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The role of teachers in teaching literature

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Abstract

This paper provides review of ideas and research on the role of the teacher in teaching of literature. Literature and language are closely related and this is a fact no one can deny. Literature is constituted by language and it represents one of the most recurrent uses of language. Therefore, the belief that Literature in English helps to improve the students' scope of reading and their mode of expression is reiterated.

Teachers are the link between learners and knowledge. Teachers are the facilitators of learning and the authority to enable students to increase their independent learning capabilities. Teachers are important actors in the process of learning and they should encourage students to discuss, imagine, read and retell the stories in order to increase their motivation and appreciation of literature.

Key words: *Literature, Teaching Literature, Language, Language teaching, Teacher, role of Teacher.*

Introduction

Good education is of high importance for raising labor force with qualifications needed for the contemporary century. Raising individuals who think, come up with new ideas, learn and express things they learn in a correct way and use their knowledge actively in life is among the main goals of education and improving language skill makes it possible to reach these important goals.

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Based on the English Proficiency Index¹, most of the children living European states speak two languages and teaching English as the second language is strongly encouraged by these European states. The situation in Kosovo is similar, and every day more and more students are interested in learning English as the second language. High progress in communication technology has made it possible for people in any corner of the world to be aware of developments occurring far from them. These developments have led states attaching particular importance to teaching foreign languages. The fact that the number of people who speak English as a second foreign language has exceeded the number of those who speak the English as a native language proves the importance of language education for non-English speakers².

Mother tongue is learned around parents without any special effort when children reach an age of having the ability to speak. Children can also learn other languages spoken in their surrounding without taking particular lessons until the age 4-5. After this age, however language education is needed for learning foreign languages with additional efforts. A number of researches have been conducted to find the best methods and techniques to teach foreign languages in the most effective way. Therefore, teaching methods have been changing with the new findings over time and alternative and sophisticated methods are being used.

¹ *Education first: EF English Proficiency Index 2012.*

Available at: <http://www.kernvakengels.nl/english-in-54-countries.pdf>

² Graddol, David. *The Future of English? A guide to forecasting the popularity of the English language in the 21st century.* The British Council. 2000.

<https://microsites.bournemouth.ac.uk/business-postgraduate/files/2014/09/CIGBE-The-Future-of-English.pdf>

Teaching Literature

There is a close relationship between language and literature. Literature is produced from language and represents one of the most recurrent uses of language. Teachers must understand this relationship and try hard to change the traditional methods of foreign language instruction. If teachers wish to remove cultural and linguistic barriers and make learning more fruitful, they need to use modern techniques, such as audio-video materials, and develop the skills of knowledge synthesis among students. With the help of audio-video materials and technology, students can have visual information about different countries and cultures, which help them, become more familiar with foreign places. Information, such as what a teacher may find on the internet, enriches both the teacher and learner, allowing both to become better equipped before dealing with a topic. For this reason, teachers and institutions must broaden their perspective and vision. They must take a new approach and demonstrate a readiness to change so that teaching and learning can become easy, interesting and fruitful.

Norling³ believes that “the teacher has an important role in teaching English through literature.” One of the first priorities as a teacher is to determine the aim of teaching literature. Is it necessary to consider the needs and expectations of the students or is it simply mandatory for all language teachers to teach literature? Norling⁴ proposes giving a questionnaire or interviewing the students in order to set aims and objectives for the course. This is perhaps one of the soundest ideas. As stated above, it is important for the teacher to create a curriculum

³ Teresa Norling, *Aims and objectives in the teaching of English literature at upper secondary school*. Available at: <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:292256/fulltext01>

⁴ *Ibid.*

which best suits the students. The best way to do this is by turning to the main characters: the students. Secondly, Norling⁵ states that the teacher is responsible for setting the activities, teaching methods and techniques, and for determining the appropriate language level. In doing this, teachers are more likely to create suitable curriculum themes and objectives and, therefore, more likely to achieve their goals throughout the school year. After this, Norling⁶ believes that a third step must be taken: the selection of texts, during which the teacher must certainly take into consideration the students' language proficiency, interests, sex, age, etc. This is a healthy step as it does not overlook the needs of individual students and duly notes the presence of each and every student as well as their preferences.

Norling advises that:

At elementary levels, for example, students should be given simplified or specially written stories. At advanced levels, however, students are given literature in its original form so that they can develop their literary competence in the target language. To put it another way, students learn the practical, figurative, and daily use of the target language in the literary texts. They further encounter different genres of literature at advanced levels. Observing how characters in a play or a short story use figures of speech, such as simile, metaphor, metonymy, etc., so as to express their communicative intention, students learn how to write English more clearly, creatively, and powerfully.⁷

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

In other words, Norling is trying to explain that, unlike elementary-level students who are given stories which are already specifically written to meet their needs; advanced students must be given material that is original in form to give them the opportunity to develop as thinkers and writers.

The role of the Teacher

Teachers are the link between learners and knowledge. Being the first ring of the chain in this process gives teachers the opportunity to be the facilitators of learning and the authority to enable students to increase their independent learning capabilities. To better enable learners to enjoy and appreciate literary texts and develop their capacity for critical thinking, creativity, and self-expression, teachers are encouraged to⁸:

- Negotiate learning goals and content with learners in the context of a positive and harmonious learning environment
- Participate in the expression of views and ideas
- Act as a role model as a learner of literature
- Adapt teaching to learner responses
- Enhance quality interaction in the classroom
- Provide appropriate scaffolding and quality feedback; and
- promote self-access learning

Research has shown that the role of the teacher in the classroom is highly significant since he increases the achievement of foreign language learning. The role of the teacher is greater than the program or the methods used in the

⁸ <http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/kla/engedu/Curriculum%20Document/LitEngCAGuide.pdf>
(Last accessed 01.11.2015)

classroom. The ideal learning environment offers students the possibility of discovering literature and examining new situations raised. Teachers can be facilitators instead of mere lecturers or coaches by providing students with situations where they need to have different approaches and more practical examples.

The most important aspect of literature learning that teachers should be aware of is the objectives of teaching literature. Thus, teachers should make a very specific and thorough in the selection of literature to be used. In regard to this, Purves⁹ divides the role of the teacher of literature into the following series of objectives:

- the teacher must provide each student with as many different works as possible
- the teacher must encourage each student to respond as fully as he is able
- the teacher must encourage the student to understand why he responds as he does
- the teacher must encourage the student to respond to as many works as possible
- the teacher must encourage the student to tolerate responses that differ from his/her
- the teacher must encourage students to explore their areas of agreement and disagreement

Thus, teachers are important actors in the process of learning and they should encourage students to discuss, imagine, read and retell the stories. They should organize different activities to put all the learned texts into practice by improvising theatre, show prose thorough pantomimes, and provide other flexible

⁹ Alan C. Purves, *How Porcupines Make Love. Massachusetts*. Xerox College. Publishing, 1972, p. 25.

ways of creatively managing the classroom in order to increase student motivation and appreciation of literature. Common reasons for a lack of interest include teachers not using the appropriate books, teachers' expectations not being reachable for their students, teachers only understanding the text in their own experience and not being flexible toward different views, and teachers not providing context that students can deconstruct from the text. Additionally, Aim¹⁰ as cited in Talif¹¹ argues that too much information is another pitfall for teachers as sometimes they give importance to the wrong focus. Student's achievements in class are very dependent on the teacher's way of teaching and his utilization of different teaching methods. There must be a balance achieved between lessons coached by teachers, in which students listen to new information, and interactive lessons, which encourage pupils to actively learn and participate.

Norling¹² argues that one of the ways for teachers to establish effective learning, is to give the students room to connect what they read to real life situations. In order for the teacher to achieve this, he must "train the minds of the learners" to dive into the world of the writer and place themselves in his or her shoes. In other words, in order to better understand a text, students must be encouraged to read with a different lens—the lens of a either a specific character or the writer. This will allow the students to better comprehend what they are reading. After this, teachers must have the ability to move past the "non-native" issue and make the texts as relatable as possible to students who live in worlds completely

¹⁰ Richard S.Aim, "Goose Flesh and Glimpses of Glory". *English Journal* 52, 1963.

¹¹Talif Rosli, *Teaching literature in ESL the Malaysian context*, Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Pertanian Malaysia, 1995.

¹² Ibid.

different than the ones they are forced to read about. In doing so, teachers can raise literary awareness.

The above mentioned points are an indication of the important role teachers play in their students' perception of certain readings or themes discussed in class. The teacher must divide discussions in a way that allows students to express themselves and to interact with each other. Moreover, he must also leave room to lead and guide discussions as the authoritative figure – without misusing his authority.

Above all, teachers must first understand why teaching literature is important in order to make students realize the purpose of this whole process. If the teacher can explain the main purpose for students being subjected to English literature, students will be able to comprehend their goal for the course and they will be more motivated to learn.

The selection of literature and the way that it is presented to students in the classroom is also very important. Teachers should make learning creative by trying different methods and must not let students feel bored in the classroom. Teachers must be able to prepare a well-organized class where the interaction between the literature, language and composition utilizes the best language learning methods for the students.

To maintain students' interest toward the lesson of literature and increase their ability of critical and aesthetic perception, teachers should give them the opportunity of practicing, discussing, questioning, and defending their controversial perceptions toward different opinions in the classroom. The main reason for doing so is to maintain the motivation and interest of students and avoid boring classes with passive activities.

Conclusion

Figuratively speaking, the teacher is the main character in this story. The teacher plays a significant role in how literature is perceived by students in the class. It is up to the teacher to create an inviting environment for students to initially want to come to class. When this is established, students are ten times more likely to attend all classes and invest in their education. Kim¹³ states that the teacher should play a significant role in orchestrating and supporting both student interaction with the text and interaction with other students. Using the correct methods to create a suitable curriculum is very important as well. Once the teacher has created a curriculum to meet the students' needs instead of following dull curriculums which are not suitable, it is only then that students are likely to walk away with a solid understanding of the literature that has been provided. For this reason, it is essential to provide texts to the students that they would like to read or have an interest in must be taken into consideration when making the curriculum. This ensures more successful results and a higher probability that both the school and teacher will achieve the goals they set. It is important for the teacher to set activities for the students so they can express how much they know and at the same time become intrigued by what they read.

One of the most important tools a teacher has is the ability to create a hunger for knowledge. Using authentic literature in the classroom is one great pathway for cultivating this hunger. Ultimately, how and what the teacher does to create this desire is up to them. Nevertheless, teachers must remember to put the

¹³ Myonghee Kim, "Literature discussions in adult L2 learning", nē: *Language and Education*, v18 n2, 2004, p. 145-166.

students' needs ahead of their own and use sound judgement to decide how to make each course most functional.

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